United Nations CRPD/C/SR.337

Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities

Distr.: General
23 August 2017

Original: English

Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities
Eighteenth session

Summary record of the 337th meeting
Held at the Palais des Nations, Geneva, on Wednesday, 16 August 2017, at 10 a.m.

Chair: Ms. Degener

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The meeting was called to order at 10.05 a.m.

Consideration of reports submitted by parties to the Convention under article 35 (*continued*)

Initial report of Panama (*continued*) (CRPD/C/PAN/1; CRPD/C/PAN/Q/1 and Add.1)

1. *At the invitation of the Chair, the delegation of Panama took places at the Committee table.*

2. **Ms. Díaz** (Panama), said, with reference to article 3 of the Convention, that the adoption of Act No. 15 of 2016 had marked the start of introducing the disability perspective into all activities and services aimed at the population in general. In line with calls from civil society, it addressed a number of shortcomings in Act No. 42 of 1999, such as the narrow and medically based definition of disability, obsolete and anachronistic penalties for offences and an outmoded approach to accessibility. Act No. 15 bolstered the country's legal framework in the area of disability, establishing more efficient legal provisions and mechanisms. Moreover, the terminology used had been substantially revised and updated, particularly with regard to physical accessibility and the definition of "person with a disability", which had been amended to include the fact that the concept of disability referred to the interaction between an individual's limitations and personal and environmental factors, in line with the Convention. The concepts covered in article 24 of the Convention, on the right to education, were also included, and the responsibilities of State bodies were set out more clearly than in Act No. 42, which had left some room for avoidance of obligations.

3. Turning to article 4, particularly subparagraphs (d) and (e), she explained that Telethon 20-30 had been run by a non-governmental civil society organization since 1981 and had always promoted infrastructure projects to provide care and rehabilitation for persons with disabilities. Once facilities had been built, they were transferred to government administration and management. The Government acknowledged the Committee's concern with regard to the incompatibility between such fundraising activities and the rights-based approach to disability and hoped that its recommendations could be used as a basis for making progress, in conjunction with key stakeholders and civil society.

4. **Ms. Rudy Arellano** (Panama) said that the Government had established a commission to support and monitor the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals and was incorporating them into its strategic social and economic planning, which was based on the principle of social equity. The six elements of the National Strategic Plan 2015-2019 were closely linked to the Goals, focusing on health, education, employment, public services, human rights and access to technology. The National Strategic Plan for the Social Inclusion of Persons with Disabilities and their Families, formulated with input from civil society and the public authorities, aimed to overturn negative social models of disability and ensure that the rights of persons with disabilities were upheld. The Plan, which was also aligned with the Sustainable Development Goals, was intended for use in planning at national level to ensure that the objectives of the National Strategic Plan 2015-2019 were met and to provide public, private and civil society organizations with a framework for developing projects to improve the quality of life and empowerment of persons with disabilities and their families, particularly in relation to gender and social equity. An action plan for international cooperation for the years 2017 to 2019, which included projects incorporating a disability perspective, was also being implemented.

5. **Ms. Velasco** (Panama) said, with reference to article 6 of the Convention, that a comprehensive training programme, covering topics as varied as gender-based violence, self-esteem and project development, was helping to empower women in general and enabling women with disabilities to enter the world of enterprise and improve their economic situation. The majority of women participating in the programme were heads of families.

6. Combating violence and discrimination against women had been established State policy since 2015. A high-level inter-institutional agreement set out commitments and measures to prevent the murder of women, and progress had been made in a number of

areas. The Criminal Code had been amended to include the offence of femicide and other legislation had been passed to prevent violence against women. A national committee on the subject had been set up and steps had been taken to improve coordination among police and prosecutors in their dealings with the victims of gender-based violence. A dedicated police service specializing in cases of gender-based violence had been established, with 40 units across the country. Four shelters had been set up for victims, including children. Other achievements included the creation of departments within the prosecution services to ensure equal opportunities in accessing justice, information centres for women to provide legal and psychological support and an awareness-raising campaign.

7. With regard to article 7 of the Convention, a comprehensive approach had been taken to the rights of children deprived of parental care or at risk of being so deprived. Fostering arrangements had been pursued and formalized, enabling 87 children, including 28 with disabilities, to enjoy the right to live in a family once more by December 2016. A protocol had been introduced on comprehensive care for children and adolescents who were victims of sexual violence, focusing on rights and the best interests of the minor, with no discrimination of any kind. Similar inter-institutional arrangements were in place for child and adolescent victims of abuse and commercial sexual exploitation, including special protection for victims with disabilities. A national intersectoral committee to prevent violence against children and adolescents had resumed its activities early in 2017 and a survey of the situation across the State party was nearing completion. A national prevention strategy was being devised to review legislation and plan action to prevent violence against children, including children with disabilities.

8. **Mr. Miranda** (Panama) said, with respect to article 8 of the Convention, that various activities had been undertaken to raise awareness of the rights of persons with disabilities and their families, especially among civil servants. They included workshops on awareness campaigns, with participation by persons with disabilities; the design of a mascot for the National Secretariat for Disabilities; themed speaking and painting contests for secondary school pupils nationwide; campaigns to stop misuse of reserved parking areas; and a social media campaign promoting equal rights and dignity.

9. **Ms. Medina** (Panama), referring to article 9 of the Convention, said that accessibility was already a requirement for new buildings in Panama City and similar arrangements were being extended to the rest of the country. Construction work at Tocumen International Airport was being carried out in close collaboration with the administrative authorities to ensure that accessibility was taken into account in design and planning. Efforts were being made to improve access to Government buildings, including by providing accessible routes through public spaces, and to improve inter-institutional awareness and coordination on the issue, with inspections carried out periodically. There were plans to replicate in other local government areas the success of the Panama City technical advisory committee, which operated on the principle of universal accessibility. The National Secretariat for Disabilities was taking steps to raise awareness of disability-related legal issues, risk management and architectural considerations among companies in the air and surface transport sectors, promoting a rights-based approach.

10. The rights of the hearing-impaired community, including the right to communicate in their natural language, had been recognized for many years. Recently, however, a change to legislation had categorically established Panamanian Sign Language as the natural language of persons with hearing disabilities. Other alternative means of communication were also being encouraged to promote language development.

11. **Ms. Vega Sánchez** (Panama) said, with regard to articles 12 and 13 of the Convention, that the State party's legislation provided for legal assistance to be given to victims of crime, including free legal aid in cases of economic hardship. Act No. 82 of 2013, on measures to prevent violence against women, specifically provided that women with disabilities were entitled to equal treatment with all members of their family and to be provided with appropriate spaces and conditions of equity, opportunity and autonomy. The legal aid department had a team of lawyers across the country; its numbers had doubled between 2011 and 2017, and currently stood at 61. Legal aid had been provided to persons with disabilities, including 31 women and 6 men, in domestic violence cases in 2016.

12. Agreements were in place between the judicial authorities, the National Secretariat for Disabilities and other disability bodies to provide sign language services in trials involving a person with a hearing disability. The judicial authorities had 26 members of staff trained in Panamanian Sign Language. The courts ensured that domestic and international law on the rights of persons with disabilities was upheld. In some cases, alternative, non-custodial sentences had been handed down to avoid harm to the physical or mental integrity of persons with disabilities. In others, the Supreme Court had ordered the reinstatement of persons with disabilities or parents of children with disabilities in their jobs.

13. The statistics showed that, up to 2015, 34 people working for the judicial authorities at various levels had declared a disability voluntarily. Technical aids had been purchased and adjustments made to enable them to fulfil their roles and to improve accessibility in the working environment. Labour legislation covering the staff of the judicial authorities stipulated that parents or guardians of children with disabilities were entitled to paid leave for their children's treatment appointments.

14. In line with rulings of the Supreme Court, Panama recognized the constitutional hierarchy of international human rights protection instruments. The standards enshrined in domestic legislation were considered a minimum and did not preclude others that had a bearing on fundamental guarantees.

15. The authorities had conducted a study on the legal personality of persons with disabilities, the recommendations of which would be evaluated and transmitted to the appropriate bodies for consideration. In parallel, the judicial authorities were raising awareness among judges and magistrates, who would be responsible for applying the new provisions, through educational events organized in conjunction with units dealing with access to justice and gender issues. A group of judges and magistrates from the family courts were working on the reform of the Family Code, addressing issues such as guardianship. The Government recognized the need to continue supporting persons with disabilities in exercising their legal capacity and to ensure that they enjoyed the right to a fair trial in criminal proceedings.

16. Steps taken by the judicial authorities to guarantee human rights and access to justice for persons with disabilities included disseminating relevant domestic and international law, adapting infrastructure, using technology in judicial proceedings, publishing information in accessible formats and establishing guidelines on dealing with vulnerable groups, including persons with disabilities. Mobile mediation services were available for persons with reduced mobility. An assessment report on equal access to justice for women, persons with disabilities and adolescents in conflict with the law had resulted in the adoption of an official policy on access to justice and gender by the Supreme Court in 2009.

17. **Ms. González** (Panama) said that mental health problems were detected and treated in a timely manner and patients had access to the necessary psychoactive medication. Mental health services were undergoing reform and would increasingly be available at the primary care level. Panama was a member of the subregional suicide monitoring body for Central America and the Dominican Republic and had used the World Health Organization Mental Health Gap Action Programme to train basic health-care providers. Persons with mental disabilities who posed a risk to themselves and others received involuntary treatment for their own protection.

18. The Government acknowledged that the legislation on the sterilization of women needed to be amended to protect the rights of women with disabilities. Self-induced abortion or consent to an abortion was punishable by imprisonment of 1 to 3 years, and the performance of an abortion with the mother's consent by imprisonment of 3 to 6 years, but it was considered lawful if the pregnancy was the result of rape or if the life of the mother or fetus was at risk.

19. **Ms. Espinosa** (Panama) said, with reference to article 19, that an executive committee on decentralization, which included representatives of the National Secretariat for Disabilities, had been established to oversee the process of municipal decentralization. Municipal resource allocations were calculated using a solidarity-based formula and the minimum allocation was adjusted biennially in line with tax receipts.

20. In 2016, over 125 million balboas (B) had been invested in municipal projects and public consultations had been held on 1,366 such projects. Communal councils had received over B 70 million and municipal town halls over B 8 million through the programme for investment in public works and municipal services. Under that programme, 7,179 projects had been approved across the country, on a budget of B 98 million. Funding also continued to be provided for projects under the community development and public infrastructure programme.

21. In 2017, communal councils and municipal town halls had received almost B 80 million and a total of 1,255 projects had been approved, on a budget of more than B 100 million. Between 2012 and 2016, training on disability policies and the rights of persons with disabilities had been provided to staff of 768 local authorities, including senior officials and representatives of indigenous peoples, and a complementary guide had been published.

22. **Ms. González** (Panama) said that the home care system for persons with a moderate to severe illness currently catered for over 4,000 persons. Primary care facilities implemented a comprehensive care programme for adults and older persons. More than 3,000 persons received home assistance under the palliative care programme.

23. **Ms. Díaz** (Panama) said that there were 25 sign language interpreters registered with the National Association of Sign Language Interpreters. A degree programme in sign language interpreting had been introduced in 2016. The provisions on sign language interpreting in the legislation on equal opportunities had been brought into line with international standards. An inter-institutional committee would be established shortly to provide support to sign language interpreters.

24. **Mr. Chaker** asked how the State party ensured that persons with disabilities could exercise the right to freedom of expression and opinion, including the freedom to seek, receive and impart information and ideas on an equal basis with others and, in particular, what measures were taken to ensure that they received information intended for the general public in a timely manner. He also enquired what steps had been taken to ensure the provision of sign language interpreting for television programmes, including news broadcasts.

25. **Mr. Buntan** said that he would like to know the legal basis for the provision of sign language interpreting, audio description and captioning for television broadcasting. He would also like to know how the State party interpreted and implemented the concept of inclusive education and whether special education establishments served to support a transition from segregation to mainstreaming. Lastly, he would welcome information on the participation of persons with disabilities in political and public life, including clarification as to whether persons deprived of legal capacity were able to exercise their voting rights.

26. **Mr. Rukhlodov** asked whether there were any State programmes or requirements regarding education for deaf persons, whether the University of Panama offered teacher training on working with deaf children; and whether sign language interpreting was available for deaf students. He further enquired whether there were any members of the National Assembly with disabilities; whether voting procedures, facilities and materials were accessible to persons with disabilities; and whether sign language interpreting or captioning was provided for televised political statements and debates. Lastly, he asked whether there was a State programme for the development of adaptive sports for persons with disabilities.

27. **Mr. Martin** said that he would like to know what steps had been taken to provide information in accessible formats for persons with disabilities other than sensory disabilities, including easy-read formats for persons with intellectual disabilities and accessible formats for indigenous persons with disabilities whose first language was not Spanish. In addition, it would be interesting to hear how persons with intellectual disabilities were involved in the provision of disability awareness training for health professionals and what steps had been taken to ensure that all persons with disabilities, including intellectual disabilities, were able to participate in mainstream sporting activities.

28. **Mr. Tatić** said that he would appreciate more information on the availability of sign language interpreting in tertiary education, the physical accessibility of universities and, more generally, the accessibility of tourism and cultural activities.

29. **Mr. Ruskus** said that he would like to know what measures had been taken to support families of children with disabilities; whether the right of persons with intellectual or psychosocial disabilities to marry was restricted under the Family Code or other national legislation; what mechanisms were in place to prevent discrimination against persons with disabilities and their families in the labour market; and whether the State offered incentives to promote the inclusion of persons with disabilities and their families in the open labour market on an equal basis with others.

30. **Mr. Ishikawa**, noting that the National Disability Council, which was one of the two mechanisms mandated to monitor the implementation of the Convention, had held only one meeting since 2009, said that he would welcome confirmation of the State party's commitment to strengthening the Council to enable it to perform its monitoring role, as well as to ensuring the full participation of persons with disabilities and their representative organizations in the monitoring process.

31. **Mr. Kim** Hyung Shik said that it would be useful if the delegation could provide data illustrating the current situation with respect to the employment and income level of persons with disabilities, as well as some examples of recent legislative developments in that area. Noting that the State party was a party to the International Labour Organization (ILO) Vocational Rehabilitation and Employment (Disabled Persons) Convention, 1983 (No. 159), he drew attention to the report published by ILO in 1994 on decent work for persons with disabilities.

32. He said that the Committee needed more data in order to be able to assess whether persons with disabilities enjoyed a decent standard of living. It was unclear to what extent persons with disabilities were involved in developing and monitoring international cooperation projects. The State party could engage in international cooperation to improve the standard of living for persons with disabilities and to address the issue of unemployment among persons with disabilities, in keeping with targets 8.5 and 10.2 of the Sustainable Development Goals.

33. **Mr. Kabue**, welcoming the State party's ratification of the Marrakesh Treaty to Facilitate Access to Published Works for Persons Who Are Blind, Visually Impaired, or Otherwise Print Disabled, asked what measures would be taken to implement the Treaty. He also enquired what role the Government played in the provision of social protection for persons with disabilities and how persons with disabilities were identified as eligible to receive financial assistance under the programmes mentioned in the State party's report and replies to the list of issues. Lastly, noting that concerns had been raised as to the reliability of data on persons with disabilities, he asked what percentage of the population had a disability, according to the most recent statistics, and how that figure had been reached.

34. **Mr. Langvad** said that he would like to know what steps were being taken to ensure that persons with disabilities, especially those with intellectual or psychosocial disabilities, received the medical treatment that they required, on an equal basis with others. It would be interesting to learn more about the methods used by the State party to ascertain how many persons with disabilities required home care and, more generally, to collect reliable and usable data on the needs of persons with disabilities.

35. **The Chair** said that she would welcome information on the State party's plans to implement the right to inclusive education, particularly with respect to girls with disabilities. The Committee was concerned by reports that special education in Panama was of very poor quality and by the finding that over 50 per cent of teachers did not feel ready to teach persons with disabilities, according to a study conducted by the National Secretariat for Disabilities in 2014.

36. She would like to know whether action would be taken to end all forms of corporal punishment against children with disabilities, pursuant to the universal periodic review recommendations accepted by the State party in 2010 and 2015, as well as the recommendation made by the Committee on the Rights of the Child in 2011. Lastly, she

recommended including the questions of the Washington Group on Disability Statistics in every national census.

37. **Mr. Parra Dussan** (Country Rapporteur) said that he would be interested to know when the State party expected the transition from the special education model to inclusive education to be completed. He would also welcome information on the funding to pay for interpreters for students with hearing impairments and whether the right to such interpreters was guaranteed in schools as well as at university level. On the right to health, he wished to know whether persons with disabilities were given priority in obtaining access to public health services and particularly, in the light of the recent problems with pharmaceutical supplies, in obtaining the medicines they needed. Noting the 2 per cent employment quota for persons with disabilities, he would like to know what the current situation was and when the 2 per cent threshold was expected to be reached in both private businesses and the public sector. Furthermore, he would welcome clarification on which body processed statistics such as the survey information showing that 11 per cent of the population lived with disabilities. Lastly, he would like to hear about the institutional set-up of the National Secretariat for Disabilities, whether it, the National Disability Council or another body would be monitoring compliance with the Convention and, if so, whether the body concerned met the requirements of the principles relating to the status of national institutions for the promotion and protection of human rights (Paris Principles).

The meeting was suspended at 11.35 am and resumed at noon.

38. **Ms. Castro de Tejeira** (Panama) said that, the previous week, the President had presented the Government's new road map for education, aimed at delivering a participatory educational process, within which one of the recognized challenges was the provision of appropriate support to students with disabilities. Under the different thematic areas — quality, equity, teacher training, administration and investment — there was to be a review and an alignment of standards. The new policy aimed at reducing inequality in access to education, with particular emphasis on the identification and inclusion of children from vulnerable groups, including children with disabilities. A multisectoral standing council was to be set up to address implementation of the National Commitment for Education and support the authorities in establishing access to high quality education as a human right. The council would be transparent in its action and accountable to civil society.

39. **Ms. de Villalobos** (Panama) said that the education provided to children with disabilities was currently going through a transition towards an inclusive system. There were still 21 special education schools in the official sector, but the services offered were being expanded in 4 schools nationally, including in the Guna Yala indigenous region, where education and support services had been available locally for all young people of school age for the previous two years. Seven resource centres were able to supply Braille products for persons with visual impairments. The Government was now looking at harmonizing national legislation in favour of inclusive education, and the right to education on an equal basis within an inclusive system had been recognized with the adoption of Act No. 42 on equal opportunities for persons with disabilities, which included provision for the requisite funding. To provide support for children with hearing impairments, a programme set up two years previously employed persons from the deaf community as teachers in mainstream and special schools to help children in the early years of school learn Panamanian Sign Language. There were 502 registered deaf students in the country, of whom over 70 per cent went to community schools, the remainder still attending special schools. The "Hablando con Julis" learning software was a useful support for the children, as well as their families and teachers. Under a social entrepreneurship programme, the children had been provided with free batteries for their hearing aids.

40. **Ms. Delgado** (Panama) said that the 2014 study on inclusive education had led to the investment of more than B 2 million in training for 15,000 staff of educational centres — directors, supervisors and teachers — the aim being to empower the whole community in the area of inclusive culture. The training programme, which included the use of information and communications technology, was run on a quarterly basis.

41. **Ms. Diaz** (Panama) said that, while much remained to be done in providing proper access to information for persons with hearing impairments, the Government had many

achievements to its credit, including the presence of sign language interpreters on the most important programmes on the State television channel and one private channel and the systematic provision of interpreters whenever there was a national emergency. It had ratified the Marrakesh Treaty to Facilitate Access to Published Works for Persons Who Are Blind, Visually Impaired, or Otherwise Print Disabled and was in the process of developing the appropriate texts for its implementation.

42. **Mr. Miranda** (Panama) said that support was available for the families of persons with disabilities, notably in helping them set up small businesses in remote, rural areas and marginalized urban areas. That programme had so far helped improve the quality of life of more than 6,000 persons. An economic transfer programme gave over 1,600 persons with disabilities a monthly allowance to help with general expenses, such as health, education and transport costs, allowing them to live an autonomous and productive life. The "Guardian Angel" project, set up to provide economic support for persons needing constant help, had improved the lives of more than 16,000 individuals thus far, for an investment of US $ 6 million. In the area of legislation, a 2017 amendment to Act No. 42 permitted parents, guardians and persons with disabilities to attend 144 hours of rehabilitation and other services. In the country's political life, one member of the National Assembly was a person with a hearing impairment; and for voters, the Electoral Court had made provision on the Internet and through telephone services to ensure that persons with disabilities were able to vote in a place accessible to them.

43. Panama attached great importance to sport, and made a significant investment in the games organized by the Central American Isthmus Council on Sports and Recreation and the Special Olympics, among others. Indeed, Panama had hosted the Latin American Special Olympics Games earlier in 2017. The Panama Sports Institute provided continuing support to the Paralympic Committee of Panama. A number of initiatives had been launched by civil society, including tandem bicycle rides to enable persons with visual impairments to go cycling with a sighted partner.

44. **Ms. Velasco** (Panama) said that there was no legal restriction on the marriage of persons with disabilities in national legislation. The only impediments to marriage set out in article 34 of the Family Code were for same-sex partners, relatives by blood, adoption or marriage, and persons convicted of murder. However, the Government acknowledged that challenges remained in that regard and that further work was required to amend legislation that contained pejorative language in respect of persons with disabilities and had a negative impact on the recognition of their legal capacity, particularly in the case of persons with intellectual disabilities, which could in turn have an effect on their ability to marry and form a family.

45. **Ms. Ordoñez** (Panama) said that the Government implemented a number of programmes and projects to improve employment opportunities for persons with disabilities and develop their skills. In the course of the 1,150 labour inspections carried out over the past three years, employers had been informed about the rights of persons with disabilities to equal work and equal pay and the applicability of the 2 per cent quota for companies with more than 25 employees. Companies that refused to meet or maintain the 2 per cent quota of employees with disabilities were obliged to pay to the Ministry of Labour and Workforce Development an amount equivalent to the minimum salary for each person not hired for as long as they failed to meet the quota. In the private sector, most persons with disabilities were employed in the hospitality sector, general services, construction and local banking, primarily in Panama City, Chiriquí and Veraguas. Employment rates in the remaining provinces of the interior lagged behind. All the offices of the Employment Directorate nationwide were physically accessible and a service platform had been set up in 2016 to provide guidance on employment opportunities. As a result all of the measures taken, some 3,245 persons with disabilities had entered the labour market, supporting the economic development of the country and their families, with 777 employed in the public sector. The Government recognized the need to strengthen strategies aimed at increasing the employment of persons with disabilities in both the public and the private sector, and particularly to create opportunities for indigenous women. Executive Decree No. 60 provided for a financial incentive for all employers that hired persons with disabilities,

equivalent to twice the salary paid for a period of up to six months. The relevant statistics would be provided in writing.

46. **Ms. González** (Panama) said that, in line with Decision No. 321 of 2005, Panama had a policy of providing free comprehensive health care for persons with disabilities on a priority basis. The National Office of Comprehensive Health Care for Persons with Disabilities coordinated with liaison units in each of the country's 15 health-care regions. Meetings were held twice a year to evaluate strategies to achieve the targets set. There were nine rehabilitation facilities nationwide — eight centres in provincial capitals and the National Physical Medicine and Rehabilitation Institute in the capital — and there were plans to open a further four centres in the interior and a neurodevelopment institute by 2019, so that 13 of the 15 health-care regions would be covered. The Government was aware of the limited human resources available to provide the necessary services and was therefore taking the appropriate measures to recruit staff. Persons wishing to request home care services could do so at their nearest health-care facility. Persons with a terminal illness were automatically referred by their doctor to the programme of palliative care, under which a range of services, including physiotherapy and pain management, was available. The provision of medicines to persons with disabilities was free of charge. Act No. 28 of 2014 had established a specific programme for the care of persons with rare diseases. In response to the medication crisis, moreover, in order to accelerate the process of obtaining health records, additional staff had been appointed to the Drugs and Pharmacy Directorate of the Ministry of Health. As for the scarcity of baclofen specifically, the necessary steps were being taken to acquire and distribute that drug in the pharmacies of the Ministry of Health. The latest drugs had been acquired for persons with mental disabilities with a view to minimizing side effects.

47. **Ms. Díaz** (Panama) said that, since the establishment of the National Secretariat for Disabilities, five National Disability Councils had been presided over by the President of the Republic and his predecessors. The Government recognized the need to ensure that the Councils operated in accordance with the relevant legislation. The eight working groups of the current Council continued to meet regularly and carried out their activities in accordance with the national strategic plan and operative plans of each of the institutions represented on the Council. Disability was a cross-cutting issue and not simply the remit of the National Secretariat for Disabilities and organizations of persons with disabilities. The Secretariat was firmly of the view that education was the key to bringing about change. Accordingly, a master's course had been developed on public policy for the social inclusion of persons with disabilities, including modules on the development and administration of projects, and a significant number of scholarships had been awarded to representatives of civil society. More than half the places on the diploma course in strategic planning, for which there were no academic requirements, had been allocated to members of civil society.

48. The first national survey on disabilities had been conducted in 2006, so the importance of conducting a second one was clear. The fact that the National Statistics and Census Institute had found that 3 per cent of the population had a disability, whereas the first survey on disabilities had put that figure at 11.3 per cent, was not surprising, given that the census recorded information only on severe disabilities, while the survey reflected all degrees of disability. It had been decided to use the Model Disability Survey so as to capture not just the prevalence of disability but information on how persons with disabilities lived their lives, which would facilitate the development of public policies, strategic plans, projects and programmes, including technical assistance and reasonable accommodations, that responded to the real needs of persons with disabilities. The Secretariat was working with the National Statistics and Census Institute and representatives of a range of other institutions to prepare census questions, incorporating the Washington Group Short Set of Questions on Disability. The aim was to ensure that the census was inclusive and collected information on persons with all degrees of disability, including minor and temporary disabilities, to ensure that they had access to the benefits and legal protections to which they were entitled. The State party needed the support of civil society and international organizations for the implementation of the second survey, which would be comprehensive and include information on carers and families of persons with disabilities.

49. **Ms. Rudy Arellano** (Panama) said that a committee established in 2012, headed by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, was responsible for monitoring implementation of the human rights treaty bodies ratified by Panama and redirecting public policies to achieve the recommendations of the treaty bodies. Twenty-five institutions were represented on the committee and consultations were conducted with civil society. Since 2015, the committee had focused on ensuring that Panama complied with its reporting obligations to the treaty bodies. Following the constructive dialogue with the Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, a working group led by the Secretariat would follow up on the recommendations made.

50. **Ms. Díaz** (Panama) thanked the Committee for its constructive questions, comments and recommendations. She said that her country's ratification of the Convention had enabled it to make progress in the promotion and protection of the rights of persons with disabilities, equality and non-discrimination. Institutional adjustments had been made and disability had been mainstreamed into public policies. Strengthening the social inclusion of persons with disabilities was an integral part of the country's policies in the areas of education, employment and social protection. The delegation had been transparent and honest about the progress that it had made, as well as the challenges and institutional and legislative obstacles that remained. Panama was working to achieve the full recognition in the near future of the legal capacity of all persons with disabilities. The Government was conscious of the need to improve the effectiveness of prevention and oversight mechanisms in order to be able to better address human rights violations committed against persons with disabilities. Panama was fully committed to implementing the Convention and guaranteeing the rights of the more than 400,000 persons with disabilities living in the country. It would make every effort to make the changes necessary to bring its legislation into line with international standards and continue to work with the Committee and civil society to overcome the outstanding challenges.

51. **Mr. Parra Dussan** thanked the delegation for the positive and constructive dialogue and commended it on its openness in acknowledging the shortcomings and challenges that remained. He said that the Committee was confident that the State party, which had been only the second country to ratify the Convention, would continue to build on the progress already made in enhancing the protection of the rights of persons with disabilities in the country and applying the paradigm of the Convention. The Committee would make a series of objective and achievable recommendations aimed at improving the living conditions of persons with disabilities in Panama.

52. **The Chair** thanked the delegation for the constructive dialogue and said that she hoped that the Committee's recommendations would further guide the State party in its commitment to the rights of persons with disabilities.

The meeting rose at 12.55 p.m.